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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

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SUBJECT: ABBAS, FATAH OLD GUARD CLASH ON GAZA FIELD COMMITTEE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (a) and (c)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Abbas created a 17-member Fatah field committee for Gaza December 23 to lead reform and mobilization efforts, and plans to establish a similar committee for the West Bank shortly. Fatah Central Committee (FCC) powerbrokers are resisting efforts to bypass them, however. The Gaza committee is a conscious balance between allies of Fatah Secretary-General for Gaza Ahmad Hillis and PLC member Muhammad Dahlan. Grassroots Fatah leader Qadura Faris described the committees as potentially important components of serious internal reform, but said they will require a clear mandate, adequate resources, and operation independent from the FCC to be effective. Reform is critical, Faris said, as Hamas is presently much better organized and funded than Fatah, and more effectively meets Palestinians' needs. End Summary.

Abbas Creates Fatah Field Committee for Gaza

¶2. (C) President Abbas issued a decree December 23 creating a 17-member Fatah field committee for Gaza. On December 24 in Ramallah, he told the Consul General that Fatah is creating two field committees to lead reform and mobilization efforts: one in the West Bank, with composition to be determined soon, and the other in Gaza, led by Fatah PLC member Majd Abu Shamala. The overall coordinator for both field committees will be Rawhi Fattuh, he said.

Mandate/Reporting Unclear

¶3. (C) The field committees have the general mission of organizing and mobilizing support for Fatah. The exact mandate and chain-of-command remain unclear, however, according to Fatah officials involved in creating the committees. While Fatah committees have historically answered to the Fatah Central Committee (FCC), West Bank Fatah officials said that Abbas has indicated that the new committees answer to him, and operate independently of the FCC. Abbas's appointment of the Gaza field committee and order that it report to him has angered Gaza's FCC Organization/Mobilization Committee (OMC) chief Abdallah Efranji, according to these officials. (Comment: West Bank FCC OMC chief Hani al-Hasan and other FCC members will likely view Abbas' bypass of the FCC similarly. End comment). While Ahmad Hillis consulted with Efranji on some of the field committee members, according to Fatah officials, others were appointed by Abbas without Efranji's imprimatur.

Gaza Committee: Mix of Dahlan/Hillis Allies

¶4. (C) The Gaza field committee's key figures, in addition to chairman Abu Shamala (a close ally of PLC member Muhammad Dahlan), include: Abd al-Hakim Awad (head of Fatah's Youth Organization and a Dahlan ally), Jamal Abu al-Jidyan (Fatah Secretary for North Gaza, and a close associate of Ahmad

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Hillis), and Rassam al-Bayari (head of Fatah's Labor Office, Secretary for Central Gaza, and another Hillis ally). Fatah

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officials describe the committee's composition as a conscious balance between allies of Hillis and Dahlan, who they say have developed a more cooperative relationship in recent weeks compared to past infighting.

Committees Potentially Avenues
for "Serious Internal Reform"

¶5. (C) Grassroots Fatah leader Qadura Faris told the Consul General December 27 that the field committees are an important component of serious internal reform efforts, especially if they operate independently from the FCC, but will need a clear mandate and adequate resources to be effective. Whether or not the PA conducts early elections, he said, Fatah needs true reform, to include decreasing FCC influence while reconnecting with the movement's popular roots.

¶6. (C) Muhammad Dahlan also spoke positively to the Consul General about the Gaza field committee's potential to enable reform. He said that he will provide suggestions on how the U.S. can empower and assist Fatah grassroots committees.

(Comment: The FCC and Dahlan have never been close; FCC members view Dahlan as a competitor for control of Fatah bent on reducing their authority. End Comment).

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Comment

¶7. (C) The role and mandate of the Fatah field committees is very much a work in progress: depending on whether these committees are empowered and resourced, they could either give a voice to grassroots activists previously locked out of decision-making, or could turn out to be irrelevant if the "Old Guard" asserts control over them. Key indicators of the seriousness of these committees will be whether they report through the FCC and whether the composition of the West Bank committee includes representative of mid-level street/grassroots activists.

WALLES